Untrodden peaks and unfrequented valleys

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Leipzig, 1873

Chapter IX. To Agordo and Primiero

urn:nbn:at:at-ubi:2-9187

CHAPTER IX.

TO AGORDO AND PRIMIERO.

Difficulty of getting under Way—Fishing for Timber—Cencenighe—A Valley of Rocks—Agordo and its Piazza—The Mines of the Val Imperina—The Dinner "Dolorous"—A splendid Storm—Voltago and Frassene—An "Untrodden Peak"—The Gosalda Pass—A Land of Famine—Monte Prabello—The Cereda Pass—A Journey without an End—Castel Pietra—Primiero at Last—Ancient Lineage of the Tyrolean Innkeepers.

HAVING risen literally with the dawn, we are on the road next morning before six, bound for Agordo. The Pezzés gather about the house-door to see us off. The Austrian officer who lodges over the way and soothes his Customs-laden soul by perpetually torturing a cracked zither, leans out in his shirt sleeves from a second-floor window, to see us mount. He is already smoking his second, if not his third meerschaum; and only pauses now and then to twirl his moustache with that air of serene contempt for everyone but himself which so eminently distinguishes him.

It takes some little time to strap on the bags, to say good-bye, and to induce dark Nessol to receive me upon any terms. He has a hypocritical way of standing quite still till the very moment Giuseppe is about to put me up, and then suddenly ducks away, to my immense discomfiture and the undisguised entertainment of the neighbourhood. When this performance has been repeated some six or seven times, he is hustled into a corner and pinned against the wall by main force, while I mount ignominiously at last by the help of a chair.

The road to Cencenighe lies by way of Alleghe, so that for the first five miles or more it is all familiar ground. The air is fresh, but the sky is already one blaze of cloudless sunlight. The Civita rises before us in shadowy splendour. The larks are singing as I had thought they never sang anywhere save on the Campagna between Rome and Tivoli.

Between forty and fifty bronzed and bare-legged peasants are collecting floating timber this morning at the head of the lake. Some wade; some pilot rough rafts of tree-trunks loosely lashed together; some stand on the banks and draw the logs to shore by means of long boat-hooks. One active fellow sits his pine-trunk as if it were a horse, and paddles it to shore with uncommon dexterity. The whole scene is highly picturesque and amusing; and the men, with their shirt-sleeves rolled above their elbows, and their trowsers above their knees, look just like Neapolitan fishermen. Every now and then they all join in a shrill, prolonged cry, which adds greatly to the wildness of the effect.

Skirting the borders of the lake, we draw nearer every moment to the lower cliffs of the Civita, and arrive at the scene of the great bergfall of 1771;—a wilderness of fallen rocks, like the battle-ground of the Titans. Somewhere beneath these mountains of débris lie the two buried villages. No one any longer remembers exactly where they stood, nor even which of the four* they were. That Alleghe lay near the middle of the present water, seems to be the only fact about which everyone is confident. A solitary white house, half podere, half albergo, stands on a hill just

* Alleghe; Riete; Marin; Fucine.

above the point where the Cordevole, swelled by all the torrents of the Civita, rushes out at the lower end of the lake and pours impetuously down the steep and narrow gorge leading to Cencenighe.

Here the path, after being carried for a long way high on the mountain-side, gradually descends to the level of the river, crossing and re-crossing it continually by means of picturesque wooden bridges. Here, too, an adder, sunning itself on a heap of stones by the wayside, wriggles away at our approach, and is speedily killed by Clementi, who skips about and flourishes his stick like a maniac. Meanwhile a tremendous South-West wind blows up the gorge like a hurricane, without in any way mitigating the pitiless blaze of the sun overhead, or the glare which is flung up at a white heat from the road underfoot.

At length, about 10.30 A.M. we arrive in sight of Cencenighe, a small village in the open flat just between the Val Cordevole and the Val di Canale. The Monte Pelsa, which is, in fact, a long, wild buttress of the Civita; the Cima di Pape, a volcanic peak 8,239 feet in height; and the southward ridge of Monte Pezza, enclose it in a natural amphitheatre the central area of which is all fertile meadow-land traversed by long lines of feathery poplars. Putting up here for a couple of hours at a poor little inn in the midst of the village, we are glad to take refuge from wind and sun in a stuffy upstairs room, while the men dine, and the mules feed, and where we take luncheon. One soon learns not rashly to venture on strange meats and drinks in these remote villages. We now habitually provide ourselves before starting in the morning with fresh bread and hard-boiled eggs;

and so, on arriving at a new place, ask only for cheese, wine, and a fresh lettuce from the garden. The cheese is not often very palatable, and we generally give the wine to the men; but as something must be ordered and paid for, the purpose is answered. When we are unusually tired, or minded to indulge in luxuries, we light the Etna, and treat ourselves to Liebig soup, or tea.

Beyond Cencenighe, the character of the scenery changes suddenly. It is still the Val Cordevole, but is wholly unlike its former pastoral self either above or below Caprile. Barren precipices scarred by a thousand bergfalls close in the narrow way; fallen boulders of enormous bulk lie piled everywhere in grand and terrible confusion; while the road is again and again cut through huge barricades of solid débris. Frequent wayside crosses repeat the old tragic story of sudden death. The torrent, chafed and tormented by a thousand obstacles, rages below. Wild Dolomitic peaks start up here and there, are seen for a moment, and then vanish. A blind beggar-woman curled up with her crutches in the recess of a painted shrine by the roadside, uplifts a wailing voice at our approach. All is mournful; all is desolate.

By and by the gorge widens; the great twin-towers of Monte Lucano and the splintered peaks of Monte Pizz come into sight; and, like a rapid change of scene upon a mighty stage, a sunny Italian valley rich in vines and chesnuts and fields of Indian corn opens out before us.

From thence the road, winding now in shade, now in sunshine, traverses a country which would be as thoroughly Southern as the inland parts about Naples

were it not that the houses in every little village are decorated in the Tyrolean way with half-obliterated frescoes of Madonnas and Saints. Large rambling farm-houses built over gloomy arches peopled by pigs, poultry, and children, enliven the landscape with an air of slovenly prosperity quite Campanian. A wayside osteria hangs out the traditional withered bough, and announces in letters a foot long:—"Buon Acqua gratis, e Vendita di Buon Vino" (Good Water for nothing and Good Wine for sale). By and by, a scattered town and an important new-looking church with a dome and two small cupolas come into sight at the far end of the valley. This is Agordo, an archdeaconry, and the Capoluogo, or chief place, of the district.

Two long, last sultry miles of dusty flat, and we are there. A large albergo at the upper end of a piazza as big at least as Trafalgar Square, receives us on arrival—a pretentious, comfortless place, with an arcade and a café on the ground floor, and no end of half-furnished upper rooms. Being ushered upstairs by a languid damsel with an enormous chignon (for there seems to be neither master, mistress, nor waiter about the place) we take possession of a whole empty floor looking to the front, and ask, of course, the tired travellers' first question, "What can we have for dinner?"

The answer to this enquiry comes in the astounding form of a regular bill of fare. We can have anything from soup to ices, if we choose; so, in an evil hour, we order a "real" dinner, to consist of several courses, including trout and a boiled chicken. We

even talk vaguely of spending a day or two in Agordo, for the longer enjoyment of such luxurious quarters.

In the meantime, having rested, we stroll out to see the town.

Strange to say, there is no town; there is only the piazza. Houses enough there may possibly be to make a town, if one could only bring them together and arrange them within reasonable limits; but here they show as a mere brick-and-mortar fringe, thinly furnishing three sides of a great desolate enclosure where all the children, and all the stray dogs, and all the Pallo players most do congregate. Three sides only; for the fourth is wholly occupied by Count Manzoni's dilapidated villa, with its unpainted shutters, its curtainless windows, and its outside multitude of tenth-rate gods and goddesses, which crowd the sky line of the façade like an army of acrobats and ballet-girls in stone.

The church, a modern work in the Renaissance style designed by Segusini, stands near the hotel at the upper, or East end of the Piazza. The door being open, we lift the heavy leathern curtain, and walk in; but it is like walking into "Chaos and old night." Every blind is down; every avenue is closed against the already fading daylight. A Capuchin monk and some three or four women kneel here and there, more shadowy than the shadows. A lamp burns dimly before the high altar—a few tapers flare before the shrine of the Madonna—faint gleams of gilding, outlines of frescoes, of altar-pieces, of statues, are indistinctly visible. To gain any idea of the decorations, or even of the proportions of the church, is so

impossible that we defer it altogether till to-morrow, and make, instead, the tour of the piazza.

Having done this, and having peeped into a very narrow, dirty back street running up the hill behind the town, we come home (home being the albergo of the "Miniere") to dinner.

And here I should observe that the house is so called after the copper, lead, and zinc mines that form the commercial treasure of the district. These mines, lying at the mouth of the Val Imperina, about two miles from Agordo, belonged formerly to the Republic of Venice, and are now government property. Of the wealth of their resources there seems to be but one opinion; yet the works are carried on so parsimoniously that the nett profit seldom exceeds 50,000 lire, or about £2,000 English, per annum. A quicksilver mine near Gosalda, about six miles off in another direction, worked by a private company, is reported to pay better.

Did I say that we came home to dinner? Ah, well! it was a sultry, languid evening; there was thunder in the air; and, happily, we were not very hungry. I will not dwell upon the melancholy details. Enough if I observe that the boiled chicken not only came to table in its head-dress of feathers like an African chief en grande tenue, but also with its internal economy quite undisturbed. The rest of the dishes were conceived and carried out in the same spirit:—"Non ragionam di lor," &c., &c. For my own part, I believe to this day that the cook was a raving maniac.

That dream of spending a day or two at Agordo vanished in the course of dinner. We resolved to

push on as quickly as possible for Primiero; and so, as soon as the cloth was removed, sent for Giuseppe and ordered the mules to be at the door by half-past six next morning.

That night there came a tremendous storm; the heaviest we had yet had. It began suddenly, with a peal of thunder, just over the roof of the hotel, and then continued to lighten and thunder incessantly for more than half an hour before any rain fell. The lightning seemed to run slantwise along the clouds in jagged streams, and to end each time with a plunge straight down into the earth. These streams of electric fluid were in themselves blinding white, but the light they flashed over the landscape was of a brilliant violet, as rich in colour as a burst of Bengal light. I never saw anything to equal the vividness of that violet light, or the way in which it not only stripped the darkness from the great mountains on the opposite side of the valley, but brought out with intense distinctness every separate leaf upon the trees, every tile upon the farthest housetops, and every blade of grass in the piazza below. These flashes, for the first ten minutes, followed each other at intervals of not longer than fifteen seconds, and sometimes at intervals of five; so that it almost seemed as if there were flashes of darkness as well as flashes of light. The church-bells, as usual, were rung as long as the storm lasted; but the thunder-peals overlapped each other so continually, and were echoed and re-echoed in such a grand way from the amphitheatre of mountains round about, that one only heard them now and then for a moment. By and by—at the end of perhaps forty minutes—there came a deafening final explosion, as

if a mountain had blown up; and after that, heavy rain, and only rain, till about two o'clock A.M.

At half-past six, however, when we rode out of Agordo, the weather was as brilliant as ever. Long fleets of white clouds were sailing overhead before the wind. The air had that delicious freshness that follows a thunderstorm in summer. The trees, the grass, the wild-flowers, even the mountains, looked as if their colours had just been dashed in with a wet brush, and so left for the sun to dry them.

Our way lay across the Cordevole bridge and then up a steep path, very narrow, partly paved, and shaded on both sides by barberry bushes, wild briars all in blossom, and nut trees already thick with clusters of new fruit. Monte Lucano, in form like a younger brother of the Pelmo, towered high into the morning mists on the one hand, and the wild peaks of Monte Piz and Monte Agnara peered out fitfully now and then upon the other. Thus we reached and passed Voltago—a picturesque village surrounded by green fir-woods and slopes of Indian corn. In the valley below gleamed Agordo, with its white dome; and against the Eastern horizon rose the pinky peaks of Monte Lasteie, the shadowy ridge of Monte Pramper, and the strange, solitary needle called the Gusella di Vescova, like a warning finger pointing to the sky.

Next came a cherry country, thick with orchards full of scarlet fruit—then a romantic ravine called the Val Molina—then the scattered village of Frassene, with its little church in the midst of a mountain prairie, surrounded by fir-woods. Who would dream of finding a pianoforte manufactory in such a lost corner of the hills, or a maker of violins and contrabassi a

little way lower down at Voltago? Yet at Frassene, one Giuseppe Dalla Lucia turns out pianos of respectable repute, and the fiddles, little and big, of Valentino Conedera of Voltago are said to be of unusual excellence.

And now, as we ride across this space of pleasant meadowland, the mists part suddenly overhead, and reveal a startling glimpse of three enormous pallid obelisks, apparently miles high against the blue. These are the peaks of the Sasso di Campo, one of the Primiero giants, as yet unascended, and estimated by Ball at something little short of 10,000 feet above the level of the sea. The mists part and close again; the peaks stand out for one moment in brilliant sunshine, and then melt like things of air! It is our first and last sight of the Sasso di Campo.

The path, always rising, now winds through a wooded district, stony but shady, the haunt of gorgeous butterflies. Higher still, it becomes a tunnel of greenery, only just wide and high enough for man and mule. The larches meet and rustle overhead; tiny falls trickle deliciously from rock to rock, and gush every now and then across the path; while the banks on each side are tapestried all over with rich mosses, wild strawberries, and pendent festoons of Osmunda, oak, and beech ferns. If the footway were not so steep and slippery, and the work so heavy for the mules, no place could be imagined more delicious on a day like this; for it grows hotter every hour, as the sun climbs and the vapours roll away. But the pull is too long and too difficult; and the path in many places resolves itself into a mere broken staircase of wet rock up which the two Nessols, though

riderless, clamber and struggle with the utmost difficulty.

At length one last great step is surmounted, and an immense park-like plateau scattered over with clumps of larches and firs, threaded by numberless tiny torrents, and radiant with wild-flowers, opens away for miles before our eyes, like a rolling sea of rich green sward. This is the summit of the Gosalda pass. The village of Gosalda, a rambling hamlet lying high on the mountain-side, facing Monte Pizzon, Monte Prabello and the valley of the Mis, is reached about two miles farther on. Here we put up for the regular midday rest at a very humble little albergo; where, however, we are well content to take possession of a clean landing, a deal table, a couple of wooden chairs, and an open window commanding a magnificent view over the valley and the mountains beyond. We ask, as usual, for bread, cheese, and wine; explaining that the wine is for the men, and that we require tea-cups and spoons for ourselves; but the landlady, a stupid, civil body with a goître, shakes her head and stands bewildered.

"Tazze?" she repeats, wonderingly. "Tazze?"

Finding it impossible to make her understand what tazze are, I sketch a cup and spoon upon the white-washed wall; whereupon she triumphantly supplies us with two pudding basins and two metal gravy spoons of enormous size, so that we look like comic characters taking tea in a pantomime.

"Ecco! you carry fire about with you!" exclaims this child of nature, staring at the blazing Etna with the open-mouthed astonishment of a savage.

Not caring to enter into an explanation of the

nature and uses of spirits of wine, I venture to remind her of the bread, and enquire if she has yet served the men with their wine.

She nods and then shakes her head again, with a pause between.

"Vino, si," she replies, oracularly. "Pane, no." (Wine, yes; bread, no.)

It seems only reasonable to suggest that, having no bread in the house, she should send out for some immediately. But no. She wags not her head this time, but her fore-finger—a gesture purely Italian. It is of no use to send out for bread. There is none to be had. There is none in the "paese." No one has any—no one in Gosalda. Not even the paroco. It all comes up from the valley—when they have any. It ought to come up twice a week; but the baker is not always punctual. It is now five days since he came last, and there is not a crust left in the village.

"But why do you not make your own bread up here in Gosalda?" I asked, when she came to the end of this astounding statement.

"Eh, signora, we have no baker."

"And what do you eat when the baker does not come?"

"Eh, signora—we eat polenta."

Happily, we had a little bread in the luncheon basket; but less than usual, having given some to the mules after their hard scramble up the pass. We were better off, however, than Giuseppe and Clementi, who got nothing;—not even a dish of polenta. And this in a village numbering at least some four or five hundred souls.

The peasants of the mountain district between

Agordo and Primiero seemed, so far as one could judge in a single day's journey, altogether poorer, dirtier, and more ignorant than elsewhere. Most of those whom we passed on the road or saw at work in the fields had goîtres; and few understood anything but their own barbarous patois. Even the landlady of the Gosalda albergo, though she was no doubt superior to many of her neighbours, spoke very little intelligible Italian, and had no kind of local information to give. Being asked the name of the noble mountain that formed the main feature of the view before her windows, she replied first that it was the Monte Cereda; then that it was the Sasso di Mis; and finally admitted that she did not know for certain whether it had a name at all. Yet this was a question that she must have been continually called upon to answer. The mountain, however, as set down in Ball's map, proved to be the Monte Prabello, the highest point of which (called sometimes Il Piz, and sometimes Il Pizzocco) rises, according to Mayr, to a height of 6733 feet above the sea-level.

A second pass—the Passo della Cereda—yet lies between us and Primiero. The distance is reported to be about two hours and a half from Gosalda, and a good mule-track all the way. The path begins pretty well, being steep but shady, and winding up between rocky banks, high hedges and overarching trees. This, however, is too pleasant to last; and soon it begins to exhibit in an exaggerated degree all the worst features of the worst parts of the Gosalda pass. The Gosalda pass was steep; but the Cereda pass is infinitely steeper. The Gosalda pass was wet underfoot; but the Cereda pass is for miles neither more

nor less than the bed of a small torrent. Nor are other and larger torrents wanting; for twice we have to dismount and make our way on foot from stone to stone across rushing streams some thirty feet in width.

The wonder is that anyone should be found to live in a place so difficult of access; yet we continually pass cottages, and clusters of cottages by the wayside; and the great valley down below is quite thickly populated. One woman standing at her garden gate nursing a wizened baby of about six months old, enquires eagerly where we come from, and if we do not find it a "brutta paese?"

Being assured, however, that the Signoras consider it not "brutta" but "bellissima," she is struck quite dumb with amazement.

"And where—oh! where are you going?" is her next question, asked with a frenzied kind of eagerness, as if her life depended on the answer.

I reply that we are going to Primiero, Predazzo, Vigo, and other places.

"To Primiero!" she repeats, breathlessly. "To Predazzo! Jesu Maria! What a number of bad roads you have before you!"

So saying, she leans out over the gate and watches us with unfeigned compassion and wonder, as long as we remain in sight.

Now the valley sinks lower, and the mountains rise higher with every step of the way. The road achieves an impossible degree of steepness. The mules, left to themselves, climb in the cleverest way, and act as pioneers to those on foot. At last comes a place which can no longer be described as a road

but a barrier; being in truth the last rock-wall below the plateau to which we have all this time been mounting. Here even the mules have to be helped; and, partly by pushing, partly by pulling, reach the top at last.

And now another great prairie, somewhat like the Gosalda summit, only more wild and barren, opens away in the same manner and in the same direction, like the enchanted meadow in the fairy-tale that stretched on for ever and had no ending. A little lonely osteria in the midst of this wilderness is joyfully hailed by our famishing guides, who find here not only good wine but good white bread, and plenty of it.

It has to be a short rest, however, for the day is advancing and we have already been nine hours on the road, including halts.

"How long is it now to Primiero?" asks Giuseppe, as we are moving off again.

To which the good woman replies in the self-same words as she of Gosalda:—

"Two hours and a half!"

As a rule, the finest wild flowers throughout these mountain districts love exposed situations, and flourish most luxuriantly on heights not far below the limit of vegetation. On the Cereda, instead of growing in rich confusion as at other places, they separate into distinct masses; showing here as a hillside of fire-coloured lilies; yonder as a pinky dell of ragged robin; farther on still, as a long blue tract of wild vetch interspersed with slender spires of Canterbury bells. No painter would dare faithfully to represent these incredible slopes of alternate rose and gold and blue,

At last the path begins to dip, and our hopes to rise. Every moment we expect to see the opening of some green vista with Primiero at the end of it. Meeting a decently dressed peasant of the farmer class, however, and putting the same question to him in the same words as before, we are confounded to receive precisely the same answer:—

"Circa due ore e mezza, Signore." (About two hours and a half, ladies.)

Profoundly discouraged, we ride on after this in mournful silence. It is now more than three hours since we left Gosalda and yet we seem to be as far as ever from Primiero. If we were not tired, if we were not hungry, if the mules were not beginning to stumble at every step, the thing would be almost comic; but as it is, we go on funereally, following always the course of a small torrent, and skirting long pasture tracts dotted over with brown châlets.

By and by, having made another two or three miles of way, we come upon a gang of country folk at work in the new-mown hay. This time Giuseppe raises his voice, and shouts the stereotyped enquiry. The answer comes back with crushing distinctness:—

"About three hours."

I begin to think we are under the dominion of some dreadful spell. I have visions of jogging on for ever, like a party of Wandering Jews, till all four have become old, grey, and decrepit. Suddenly Clementi turns round with an eye all smothered glee, and says:—

"Don't you think, Signora, we should get there quicker if we turned back?"

It is a small joke; but it serves to make us merry over our misfortunes. After this, we put the same

question to everyone we meet—to a group of women carrying faggots; to an old man driving a pig; to a plump priest riding "sonsily" on an ass, like Sancho Panza; to a woodcutter going home with his axe over his shoulder, like a headsman out of livery. Each, of course, gives a different answer. One says two hours; another two hours-and-a-half; a third three hours; and so on. And then all at once, when we are not in the least expecting it, we come upon a grand opening and see Castel Pietra on its inaccessible peak of cloven rock standing up straight before us. Another moment, and the valley opens out at an untold depth below—a glittering vision of chesnut-woods, villages, vineyards, and purple mountains about whose summits the storm-clouds are fast gathering.

"Ecco Primiero!" says Clementi, pointing to a many-steepled town at the end of a long white road, still miles and miles away.

This Castel Pietra—the chromo-lithograph of which, as seen from the valley, is already familiar to most readers in Gilbert and Churchill's book—is the property of a certain Count Welsperg, by whose ancestors it was built in the old feudal times, and who still lives in Primiero. The solitary tooth of rock on which it stands has split from top to bottom some time within the last century; since when it is quite inaccessible. The present owner, when a young man, succeeded once, and once only, by the help of ropes, ladders, and workmen from Primiero, in climbing with some friends to the height of those deserted towers; but that was many a year ago, and since then the owls and bats have garrisoned them undisturbed. The castle stands, a lonely sentinel, at the opening of the

great Dolomite Cul de Sac, known as the Val di Canali, and is a conspicuous object from all parts of the valley North of Primiero.

The final dip down from the Castel Pietra rock is achieved by means of a stony and almost perpendicular road, compared with which the descent from the Ghemmi on the Leuk side is level and agreeable walking. Loose stones that roll from beneath the foot, and abrupt slopes of slippery rock, make it difficult for even pedestrians with alpenstocks; but it is worse still for the mules, which slide, and struggle, and scramble in a pitiful way, being helped up behind by the ends of their tails, ignominiously.

At last we reach the level; hurry along the dusty road; pass through the ruinous-looking village of Tonadigo, and just as the church clocks are striking seven P.M., ride into Primiero. Here at the "Aquila Nera," kept by Signora Bonetti, we find rest, good food, a friendly welcome, and better rooms than the outside of the house, and, above all, the entrance, would lead one to expect. That entrance is dreadful —a mere dark arch leading to a goat-stable; but then the kitchen and public rooms are on the first floor, and the visitors' rooms on the second; so that the house may be said only to begin one remove above the level of the street.

It is curious how soon one learns to be content with these humble Tyrolean albergos, and to regard as friends, and almost as equals, the kindly folks that keep them. Nor, indeed, without reason; for setting aside that perfume of antique Republicanism that seems yet to linger in the air of all that was once Venice, those Tyrolean innkeepers are, for the most

part, people of ancient family who have owned lands and filled responsible offices in connection with their native communes ever since the middle ages. Thus we hear of a Ghedina of the Ampezzo holding an important military command at the beginning of the XVth century. The Giacomellis who now keep the "Nave d'Oro" at Predazzo were nobles some few hundred years ago. The Pezzés date back as far as Caprile has records to show, and take their name from the Monte Pezza, on the lower slopes of which they yet hold the remnant of their ancient estates. And the Cercenas of Forno di Zoldo, of whose inn I shall have more to say hereafter, are mentioned, as we find by Mr. Gilbert's book on Cadore, in documents more than five hundred years old. I do not know whether the Bonettis of Primiero claim either a long bourgeois pedigree or a past nobility; but they are particularly courteous and hospitable, and I see no reason for supposing them to be in any respect less well-born than the others.

It is only right that persons travelling, or intending to travel, in these valleys should be acquainted with the foregoing facts. And it would be well if they remembered they are not dealing here with innkeepers of the ordinary continental stamp; but with persons who are for the most part quite independent of the albergo as a source of profit, and ready to receive strangers with a friendliness that does not appear as an item in the bill. If the accommodation is primitive, it is at all events the best they have to offer; and it is immensely cheap. If the attendance is not first-rate, there is a pleasant homeliness about the domestic arrangements that more than makes up for

any little shortcomings in other ways. The mother of the family generally cooks for her guests; the father looks after the stabling; the sons and daughters wait at table. All take a personal interest in one's comfort. All are anxious to oblige. To treat them with hauteur, or with suspicion, or to give unnecessary trouble, is both unjust and impolitic. I have seen old Signora Pezzé wounded almost to tears by the way in which a certain English party secured all their possessions under lock and key every time they ventured outside the doors. The same people, on going away, disputed every item of their moderate bill, as if, no matter how little they were charged, it was to be taken for granted that they were being imposed upon somehow.

The ultimate result of such conduct on the part of our dear country-people is sufficiently obvious. The old innkeeping families will ere long close their houses against us in disgust; a class of extortionate speculators, probably Swiss, will step in and occupy the ground; newer and smarter, but far less comfortable hotels will spring up like mushrooms in these quiet valleys; all direct communication between the native townsfolk and the travelling stranger will be intercepted; and the simplicity, the poetry, the homely charm of the Dolomite district will be gone for ever.